

## Pacing: Improving your fitness

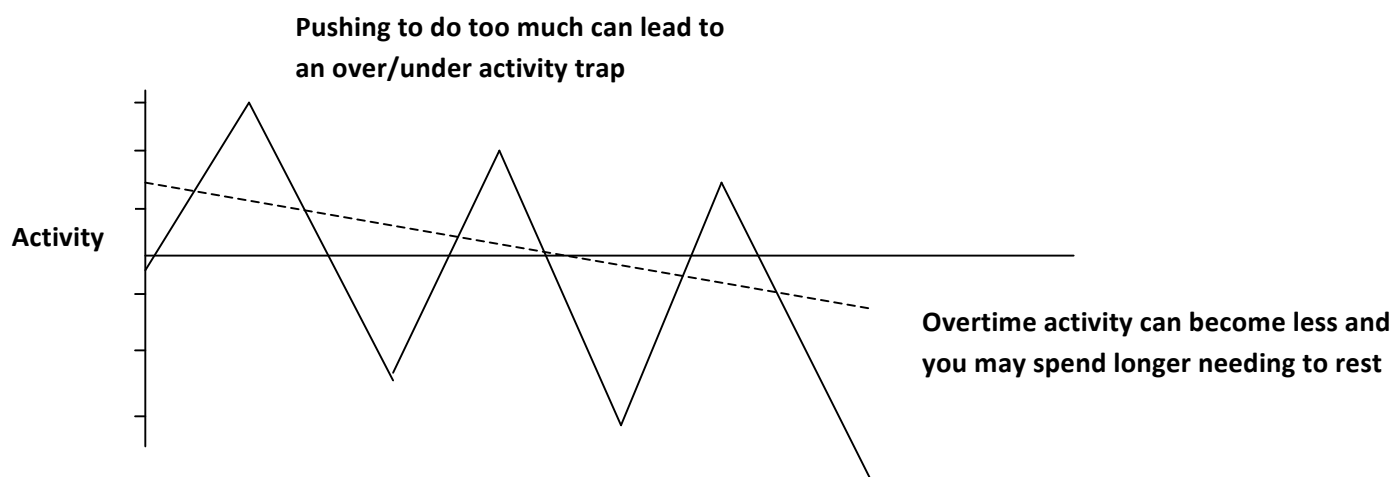
Pacing activity is an approach that can help people to cope with pain.

Persistent pain often leads to various ways of coping with everyday activities, some of which may not be helpful in the long run.

**Some ways people try to cope:**

### 1) The over/under activity trap

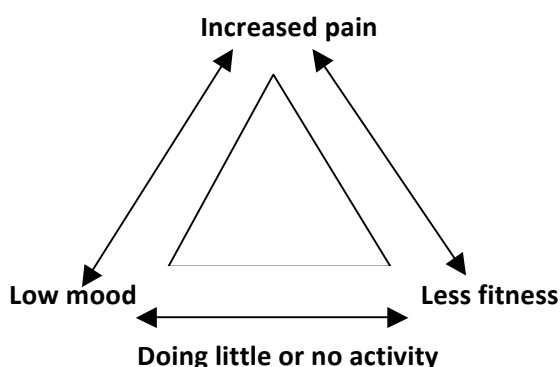
One way of coping is to develop what is known as the **“over/under” activity trap**. On a “good” day, people try to do all those things that have been building up, which can lead to **“overdoing”** and then the next day **“flare ups”** of pain can occur and more rest is needed. On the next “good” day the “over activity” happens again leading to further “flare ups” and periods of increased rest and so on. When you “overdo”, pain increases so that when you do eventually stop, often pain does not but usually continues building.



## 2) Doing less

Sometimes, people feel **doing nothing** or **very little** may be a way to cope. Over time this can lead to feeling that **life has no meaning** and low mood or depression can happen.

Additionally, **fitness levels will decrease**. During long rests, muscles become weaker and de-conditioned and joints can become stiff so that more effort will eventually be required to do the same activities.



### Practicing pacing can help

Pacing is a **technique**, which will help you to be more consistent with the activities you want to do.

Take time to **“notice”** that you can find a **“middle ground”** between doing too much and doing nothing. Pacing what you do so that you **stop according to time** rather than pain will give you **more control**.

Often setting a **“baseline” time** (see table below) for specific activities is a good place to start.

Overtime, you can **gradually “step up” the time** you spend on activities but initially it is useful to work out your baseline time even if this seems less than what you feel you could manage.

Using a paced approach can be thought of as re-training the nervous system and a **more helpful way of thinking** about how to manage activities.

### How to work out a timed tolerance for specific activities:

- a) Decide on the activity you want to manage using a timed approach **e.g.** working at the computer, sitting in good posture, walking, gardening

- b) Take a **measurement of the time** you do the activity before your body “tells you” to stop. Then do this twice more at different times of the day so that you will have three measures.
- c) Take the average of these times and then half the average to find your **baseline time** for “**working**” at the activity. Initially, this will always be at a lesser time than you usually do the activity. The “**good news**” is that overtime you can gradually add increased time to your baseline time. You can then **steadily build on the time** you manage the activity. This can help you to overcome the “over/under activity trap” or encourage you to begin trying different activities.

**Example:** Sitting in good posture

Time 1	Time 2	Time3	Average	Baseline = Half average
15 minutes	12 minutes	9 minutes	12 minutes	6 minutes

### When using a paced approach it’s useful to consider the following:

**Planning** - “can I break the activity into smaller/different stages?”, “can I take regular breaks/try different postures?”, “have I got a means (timer) to time what I’m doing”

**Prioritising** - “can I ask for help?”, “do I need to complete the activity today?”, “is this a job that really needs to be done at all?”

**Perseverance** - “notice how you can adjust to working to time rather than your usual way of how you feel”, “finding a baseline time to an activity and using on “good” or “bad” days will help you **improve tolerances**”, “**STOP** according to **TIME** and **NOT PAIN**”.

“**What might be my gains overtime?**” Overtime using a paced approach can give you additional **control** in the management pain.